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# *St. Charles* PARISH

A BRIEF LOOK  
AT THE PAST



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St. Charles Parish...  
A Brief Look at the Past

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**Above** – A rendering of  
the old St. Charles Parish  
Courthouse.

This pamphlet was written  
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– *Nancy T. Wilson*  
**1976**

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# INTRODUCTION

St. Charles is one of the original 19 civil parishes of the Territory of Orleans created in 1807 from the county of the German Coast. Hahnville, the parish seat, is located on the Great River Road just a few miles south of the original settlement of D'arensbourg (now Lucy).

St. Charles Parish has an area of 295 square miles and is bordered by St. John, Lafourche and Jefferson Parishes. Despite its proximity to New Orleans, it has maintained its own unique identity through the years. The area, which is now largely industrial, was once the site of prosperous plantations that produced indigo, rice and sugar cane as well as vegetables for the New Orleans market.

During her long history, St. Charles Parish has been ruled under French, Spanish, French Republican, United States, Confederate and again United States governments. These international and political upheavals have affected the culture, growth and progress of the parish.

Along the river the view of tankers, grain elevators and chemical plants belie the rich cultural history of the area. The old and the new have amalgamated. Large industrial complexes now sit side-by-side with raised plantation cottages, saltbox houses, modern subdivisions and cane

fields. The mighty Mississippi, which once served the plantations, now serves the industrial economy.

## THE EARLY DAYS

The natives of St. Charles Parish were American Indians. Indian artifacts ranging from arrowheads to dug-out canoes have been found in the parish.

Sites of old villages have been located on the St. Charles side of Bayou Gauche and Lake Salvador and near Hahnville, Killona and Good Hope. Among the tribes that lived in or near St. Charles Parish were the Chitimacha, Washa, Chawasha, Quinipissa, Tangipahoa, Acolapissa, Bayou Goula, Tensas, Okalosa, Choctaw, Tunica and Houma.

When Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, reached the mouth of the Mississippi in April 1682, he claimed Louisiana for France. Louisiana at the time extended as far north as Illinois.

The settlement established two forts. These French forts were under the command of a Native American by the name of Tonti. After establishing the settlement, La Salle sailed for France. When La Salle failed to return from his voyage, Tonti began an expedition to find him. A letter, which Tonti left with the chief of the Quinipissa near Hahnville, was

discovered 13 years later at the settlement near Donaldsonville.

It was in March of 1699 that Iberville ascended the lower Mississippi. The two main groups of Indians which had settled in the area were the Quinipissas on the West Bank and the Tangipahoa on the East Bank.

It would be safe to assume that he encountered these people during his exploration at the time. The tribes were part of the Muskogee nation of the southwest and spoke the Muskogee language.

## COLONIZATION — THE GERMANS

For 32 years the French persisted in their attempts to colonize Louisiana. Beset with a depleted treasury due to constant wars, France decided to allow private companies to colonize the area. Between 1699 and 1731 the majority of the colonists were of French or German extraction.

In 1717, John Law's Western Company, later known as the company of the Indies, took over the concessions. This company received the trade monopoly for 25 years. It had the right to issue an unlimited number of shares of stock and the privilege of both giving away and selling land. The company was then obligated to bring to Louisiana during the life of the franchise at least 6,000 white people and 3,000 people of color.

The first settlers recruited were French

prisoners and prostitutes who were promised their freedom in return for marrying each other and settling in Louisiana. Realizing that these people were not prepared for the new world, Law's company looked to other countries for colonists.

The virtues of the new world, some real and some fantasy, were lauded in Europe. Many Germans, persecuted or destitute due to the ravages of war, looked forward to a new land of freedom and prosperity. Of the reported 10,000 Germans who chose to make the journey to the new world, less than 2,000 arrived. Diseases begun in the ports of France due to a lack of sanitation and accommodations were carried aboard ship. Only the healthiest of German stock survived the journey.

The first Germans arrived in what is now St. Charles Parish in 1719. The ships "les Dues Freres" and "Porte Faix" carried the foreign passengers to various sections of the Louisiana coastline. A census taken in 1724 reveals the location of two German settlements located 30 miles upriver from New Orleans.

In 1722 a group of Germans from Law's company arrived in New Orleans after enduring much hardship in the Biloxi area. They approached Gov. Bienville for fare back to France. Bienville succeeded in convincing them to join the Germans 25 miles upriver from New Orleans.

The villages together became known as Karlstein (now Lucy). According to the French "L'Observateur" newspaper of



November 1896, translated by Mr. Sidney Louis Villere, of New Orleans, this group of Germans was from the Alsac-Lorraine area. These people, led by the Chevalier D'Arensbourg, settled as colonists in the Bonnet Carre Spillway area near the present day boundary of St. Charles and St. John Parishes.

D'Arensbourg became the leader of the two settlements. Records from the 1700s make frequent mention of his name. Floods, fevers, the lack of farming implements and draft animals and Indian forays made life difficult. With

characteristic energy and frugality, the Germans cleared and farmed the land and built their homes along the coast of the Mississippi. The area became known as the "Cote des Allemans," or the "German Coast."

The first church in the area was known as St. John the Baptiste des Allemand. It was established near the present site of Edgard in 1723.

From 1723 to 1740 the Germans had a chapel of their own, St. Jean des Allemands, located on the German Coast at the place referred to as Trinity Plantation.

When the church in Edgard fell into disrepair, the church community re-established the parish in what is now Destrehan. In 1740 the church parish in Destrehan became known as St. Charles Borromeo. Thus, the oldest continuous Catholic church in Louisiana had its beginnings in 1723 in St. Charles Parish.

The first church built at St. Charles Borromeo was a log cabin structure. After suffering the perils of a fire in 1806 it was rebuilt and given a coat of red paint. Thus, the "Red Church" became a landmark for boats on the river.

Note that the re-establishment of the church in Destrehan left the West Bank with no church from 1740 to 1771. This did not deter the residents on the West Bank from attending church, however. The water vehicles used to carry produce down the river to New Orleans also provided

*From the Calendar of La.  
Colonial Documents Vol. III:*

**1755 Sale:** George Heydle sells to Jean Jacques Maillard two arpents of land for 500 livres payable in three months. Signed by D'Arensbourg, Maillard and the mark of George Heydle.

**1764 Marriage Contract:** Francois Vasseur and Marie Jeanne Madert married the same day. They will follow the usage and ordinary custom practiced by this colony as to any present or future possessions. Nicholas "Maiyr," Jacque and Nicolas Materne, uncles and Jean Lampert, beaufrere of Marie all appear for the bride.

*All sign by their marks except D'Arensbourg and what presumably is the signature of the first named witness. The endorsement gives the bride's sumame as "Madre."*

transportation to the East Bank for church worship on Sundays.

The move from Trinity on the West Bank to Destrehan on the East Bank was done for another reason as well. There was an influx of people moving to the East Bank. The church, like the civil parish, was named for St. Charles Borromeo, the son of Count Gilbert Borromeo and Margaret Medici and the nephew of Pope Pius IV.

The cemetery at St. Charles is the oldest German cemetery in the South. It is the site of many beautiful and costly tombs. It is said that when Amelie Perret Rixner died, her husband, George, spent \$10,000 on her tomb. Three of the oldest tombs are those of Jacques Fortier, Jean Baptist LaBranche and Francois Trepagnier.

During the 1700s when the French Canadians joined the Germans, Louisiana was under the rule of Spain. Gov. Ulloa, who had been appointed to take possession of Louisiana for Spain, waited almost a year before appearing on Louisiana soil.

Because of this, French and German settlers still believed France would reclaim the area. The colonists were discontent. When Ulloa married in a quiet ceremony, the New Orleans society felt snubbed.

New trade regulations also fanned the flames of discontent. In 1768, the French at New Orleans and the Germans in St. Charles Parish demanded that Ulloa be removed from Louisiana. France did not reclaim Louisiana as they had hoped. Lt.

Gen. Don Alexandra O'Reilly was appointed captain general and governor of Louisiana by Spain.

O'Reilly dimmed the spirits of the insurgents with a few hangings. For some reason, Chevalier D'Arensbourg, commander of Karlstein, was spared.

The official census records from 1774 give

### *The Tombstones Read:*

#### **JACQUES FORTIER**

Born: March 4, 1759

Died: September 15, 1820

#### **JEAN BAPTISTE LEBRANCHE**

Born: May 3, 1777

Died: July 27, 1837

#### **FRANCOIS TREPAGNIER**

Born: November 17, 1775

Died: November 29, 1840

Newspaper notices of deaths in the Times of New Orleans follow: Died lately in the Chickasaw Nation of Indians on his way to Virginia, Col. Issac Hays, laid the proof of the line of stages from New Orleans to Baton Rouge and contractor for carrying mail to Fort Adams. Died on July 3, 1806, at the Barracks in New Orleans after a short illness, Lt. Johiah Taylor, of the 2nd U.S. infantry.

*\* We can assume that many of the original St. Charles residents suffered the same fate.*

information on the concessions and habitations on both sides of the Mississippi River from New Orleans to the German Coast. From the right bank village are found the families of Troxoler, Boch, Wagner, Batz, Batern, Dubs (Toups), Heidels (Haydel), Ritter, Horn, et al. From the census of the "Old German Village" on the West Bank are the names of Monthe, Raeser, Marx, Rommel (Rome), Weller, Reynard, Henche, Grabery, Schench, D'Arensbourg, et al.

According to the census of 1724, the East Bank settlement of Hoffen on the German Coast is now located in St. John the Baptist Parish. The "Old German Village" was three quarters of a mile from the Mississippi on the West Bank. The "first" Old German Village was located a mile and a half from the Mississippi and adjoined the "second" village.

In the process of acculturation German names took on new spellings. French and Spanish officials recorded what they thought should be written since very few of the Germans were literate. Records show many different spellings for the names Schexnayder and Zeringue.

These Germans had grown up in the era following the Thirty Years War. Consequently, there were few schools in Europe.

In 1766, 216 Acadians exiled from Canada joined the Germans on the "coast" of the Mississippi. Having first established themselves near the Old Red Church, they gradually moved into what are now St.

John and St. James Parishes.

With the intermarriage among the colonists the French culture became dominant. Many Schexnaydres, Haydels, Oubres, Troxlers, Tregres and Hymels grew up believing themselves to be French because the French language was spoken at home.

The inhabitants of the area still bear French and German names. Kinler, Becnel, Muntz, Webre, Kerr (Caire), Zooringen, Hahn, Rixner, Wichner, etc.

Of French Acadian origin are St. Amant, St. Cyr, St. Martin, St. Pe, Boutte, Fortier, Trepanier, Bethancourt, Trudeau, Brou, Poche, Bourgeois, Folse, Baudouin,

### *A typical census survey:*

39. **Andreas Tragefer (now Tregre)**, or Donairwoerth, Bavaria. Catholic; 37 years old; hunter. His wife at breast. Three arpents cleared. Two years on place. A good worker well lodged. His yard 90 x 90 staked off with palisades. Well cleared. Birds have caused a great deal of damage. One cow from the company. One pig.

1726: Four arpents cleared.

1731: Husband, wife, two children; two negroes; two cows.

*\* Andreas Traeger was the progenitor of all the Tregre families in Louisiana.*

Friloux, Champagne, Martin, Delery, Massicot, and Cambre.

## FRENCH ACADIAN FARE

Early colonial influences are most evident in the unique culinary traditions of the people of the German Coast.

The winter “boucherie” (hog butchering) is now a thing of the past, but many residents still make “fromage de tete de cochon” (hog’s head cheese), “boudin rouge” (blood sausage) and andouille

(smoked sausage made with meat from the neck and stomach.)

The creativity and love of food characteristic of the French lives on even today. Mothers still teach their daughters the way to keep their “bon homme” of the family happy is with good food. Milk custards, pastries, brioches, sauces and rich soups (gumbos) are daily table fare.

The French language, too, lives on. An occasional reminder of the original French populous is often heard when a child complains of hunger. Mama replies with a

### *Andouille and Chicken Gumbo File’*

This was always a Sunday dish. When all the Andouille from the boucherie was used, we made chicken gumbo file’. File’ was used by the Indians long before the first French settlers arrived.

- 4-6 pound hen
- ½ cup oil
- ¾ cup flour
- 2 ½ cups onion
- 1 ½ cups celery
- 1 pound andouille or smoked sausage
- 6 quarts water
- 4 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- ¾ cup chopped shallots (green onion)
- ¾ cup chopped parsley
- File’

Heat water in a large pot. Cut hen into serving pieces. Season with 2 teaspoons salt and ½ teaspoon pepper. Brown in hot oil. Remove chicken and set aside.

Add flour to pan drippings. Scrape bottom of skillet to loosen drippings. Make a medium brown roux. Add onions and celery. Continue cooking 10 minutes, stirring constantly. Add roux to hot water. Stir until dissolved. Add hen, andouille and remaining salt and pepper. Simmer. Remove andouille when tender. Cut into serving pieces and set aside.

Continue cooking until chicken is tender, approximately 2 hours. Add andouille, shallots and parsley. Adjust seasoning if necessary. Cook 15 minutes longer.

Remove portion to be served to a smaller pot and add file’, allowing at least ¼ teaspoon per serving. Heat 3 minutes. Do not boil. Allow one slice of andouille and 1 piece of chicken per portion. Serve over rice. Makes 4 ½ quarts. Serves 12 with some left over for the freezer.

*\* From Mam Papaul’s Country Creole Basket.*



## Okra Seafood Gumbo

During the summer months when okra was plentiful this dish was on the menu at least twice a week. Like so many other savory dishes of the South, it was even better reheated.

- ¾ cup oil
- 2 pounds okra, cut
- 2 fresh tomatoes, diced
- 1 1/2 cup chopped onions
- ¾ cup chopped celery
- ¼ cup oil
- ¾ pound peeled, deveined shrimp
- 8 large or 12 small crabs
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 2 quarts hot water
- ½ cup flour

Heat oil. Add okra and tomatoes. Fry until okra is no longer sticky, about 30 minutes. Make a dark brown roux by cooking flour in hot oil. Add onions and celery. Fry 10 minutes.

Place roux, okra, hot water, salt and pepper in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil. Add crabs and simmer 30 minutes. Add shrimp. Continue cooking 15 minutes. Adjust seasoning. Serve over boiled rice.

Makes 6 two-cup servings or 12 one-cup servings. Remove hard shell, feelers and other inedible parts of crab. Break remaining pieces into 4 sections.

*\* From Mam Papaul's Country Creole Basket.*

chuckle, “Mange une maine, et garde lautre pour de main.” (Eat one hand; save the other for tomorrow.)

The jambalaya of the area is reminiscent of Spanish paella. Made with rice, seafood or meat and fresh seasonings, it is a favorite dish of the Creoles on the coast.

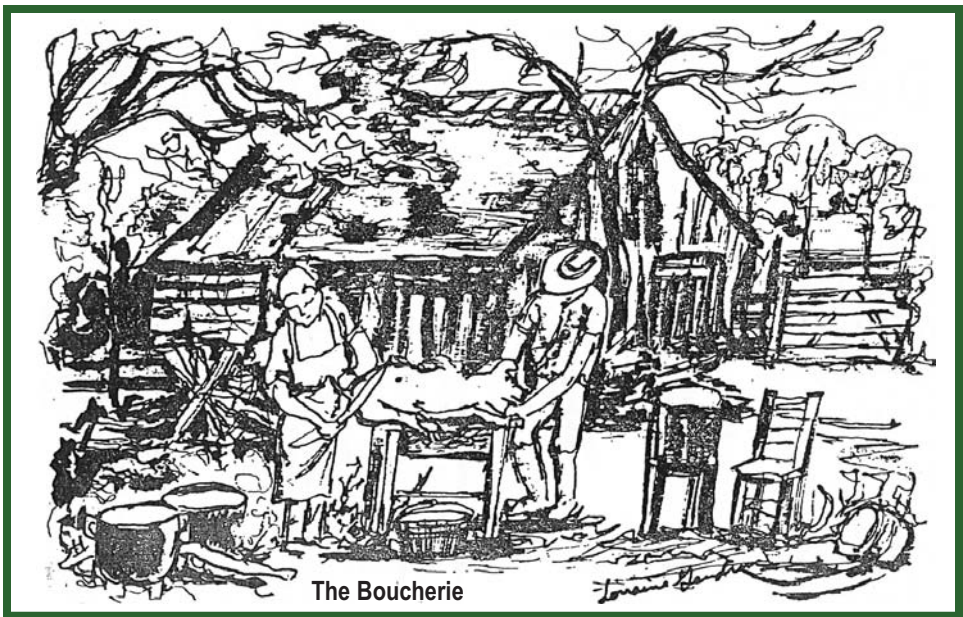
The local Indians, too, influenced the culinary traditions of the people. Their greatest and most well-known influence is the use of file’ for thickening the ever-popular gumbo. File’, the powdered leaf of the sassafras tree, was first introduced to the settlers by Indians on the streets of New Orleans.

Slaves from the West Indies and Africa contributed their talents as well in the use of spices in preparing produce and game native to the area. From the black Africans came the use of heavy iron cookware for simmering the soups, stews and bisques popular along the coast. They also introduced the people of the area to okra.

## COLONIZATION — THE ITALIANS

When the Italians joined the people of the German Coast in the late 1800s they brought the culinary and religious traditions of the old country with them.

Today they celebrate the Feast of St. Joseph much as they did in the old country. The St. Rosalie celebration, which began during a time of epidemic disease at the turn of the century, is traditional in the



The Boucherie

area.

The St. Rosalie Society was originally formed by a group of Italian men as a benevolent organization, which provided for the welfare of Italian families. The names of Cristina, Vitrano, Perino, Sardegna, Migloire, Bonura and Bosco are typical of those who joined the French, Spanish and Germans of the coast. These first settlers were typically farmers but soon proved themselves to be successful businessmen.

The following pastry is always found on the St. Joseph Altars, which are erected in his honor for favors granted by devout Italian families.

## THE CREOLES

The early settlers to the area were known to have large families. A young girl

complaining of not being able to get pregnant is often reminded by her maman, memere or nanaine that she need only “drink the water of the Mississippi as her ancestors did should she desire to bear children.”

Pierre Clement de Laussat, the French commissioner in Louisiana, wrote to his government in 1803: “What is called here the ‘German Coast’ is the most industrious, the most populous, the most at ease, the most upright, the most respected part of the inhabitants of the colony.”

Charles Gayarre, the noted historian, rounds up the praise: “Every Saturday they are seen floating down the river in small boats to carry to the market of New Orleans the provisions which were the result of their industry.

”From this humble but decent origin issued

## Fig Cakes

"Cucidata" are intricately designed fig cakes which are found on all St. Joseph altars.

Both the small cookies and large cakes are called "cucidatas," but technically the large ones are "bucelato." Typical shapes for the large ones are St. Joseph's cane, monstrances, chalices, wreaths and palms.

### Dough Recipe

- 1 cup milk
- 1 ½ cups shortening
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 ½ teaspoons vanilla
- 1 ½ teaspoons annise flavor or seeds
- 3 eggs
- 3 tablespoons baking powder

Warm the milk. Add shortening, salt, sugar, vanilla and annise flavoring. Beat eggs. Mix flour with baking powder. Add to the eggs and milk. Mix well.

Knead dough lightly. Let dough rest 15 minutes. Roll a piece of the dough out. Cut with knife into the desired shape. Place

filling on dough. Roll out another piece of dough into same shape. (Keep remainder under a damp cloth.)

Place over filling. Decorate top and seal edges by pressing firmly with tines of fork. To make small cakes roll dough into long rectangles about 3 ½ inches wide. Place filling on one side. Lap over and seal. Cut into desired lengths. Make slits along sides or top. Bake at 375 degrees until lightly browned.

### Filling Recipe

- ½ pound dried figs
- ½ pound seedless raisins (cover with brandy or whiskey and soak overnight)
- ¼ cup honey
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon allspice
- ¼ pound candied fruit
- 1 cup nuts

Grind figs, raisins, orange peel, nuts and citron. Add spices and honey. Filling is ready to use.

some of the most wealthy sugar planters. They had long ago forgotten the German language and adopted the French, but the names of many of them clearly indicate the blood that flows in their veins.

"The German Coast, so poor and beggarly at first, became in time the producer and receptacle of such wealth that what today we call the 'French Market' really began as a 'German' market with the green vegetables and the staples these German farmers laid out for the people of New Orleans on Sunday mornings.

"Many St. Charles residents still remember the refrain of traveling grocerymen:

'Watermelon, watermelon, red to the rind...  
Sweet as sugar...  
Only a dime'

Or

'Oyster Man, Oyster Man,  
Ger your fresh oysters from the Oyster Man.'

"They were busy raising families and food

– The two prerequisites for a stable society. They helped save the colony when it was starving. They produced sturdy stock in families. They built churches to implant their faith.

These three Fs – Food, Family and Faith – have made them the real heroes in this state’s history. Their achievements command our admiration and stir our hearts.”

More than once German energy, industry and perseverance conquered all. Produce from the farms saved the city of New Orleans from famine. German provisions too saved the Acadians, who moved to the south from Nova Scotia in 1768.

Although the Acadians settled the coast of what is now St. John Parish, their presence greatly affected the culture of the

surrounding area. They were hardworking farmers, herdsman, fishermen, extremely conservative and very religious.

The Acadian French settlers built cabins which were called “masion du pot eaux terre,” or “a house of post in the ground.” The spaces between the posts were usually filled with bousillage, a mixture of grass, moss and clay.

The better houses were made by placing bricks between posts and called “briquette entre poteaux,” or “brick between posts.” Gradually houses of sawed lumber and brick began to make appearances. They were roofed with straw, grass or wooden shingles. The floors were of plain earth or rough-hewn boards. They brought with them the saltbox architecture of their homeland.

Examples of this architectural style can still be found along the River Road.

## THE INDIANS

In 1682, the Okelousa appeared as allies of the Houmas in the destruction of a village of the Tangipahoa Indians on the East Bank of the Mississippi near Good Hope. In 1686 Tonti made alliance with them, and in 1699 Iberville, the founder of Louisiana, received an alliance.

In 1700 Iberville and a Jesuit priest, Father du Rut, encountered the Houmas. Father de Rut built a church and began a mission. He was succeeded the same year by Father de Limoges, but the mission did not last long. In 1706 the Tunica obtained

***Chevalier Guy Soniat Du Fossat wrote a “History of Louisiana” in 1791. Translated in 1903 by his descendant, Charles T. Soniat, Esq., he wrote:***

“Creoles are defined to be ‘the children of Europeans born in the colony’... The women, besides having the qualities above enumerated are agreeable in figure... and seldom deformed. They make good mothers and are devoted to their husbands and children, and in their marital relations seldom are they unfaithful.”

permission to settle among the Houmas but soon rose upon their hosts and massacred them.

It was in 1700, shortly after the French arrived in Louisiana, that the Quinipissa went to live with the Bayou Goulas. Not long after the union the Bayou Goulas killed most of the men and adopted the women and children into their tribe.

All was not well with other Indians in the area. In 1706 the Tensas invited the Chitimacha tribe to come and share corn, which they had gotten after destroying the Bayou Goulas. Those who accepted were attacked, captured and sold to the colonist as slaves.

In 1739 an officer with M. DeNouaille met the Chawasha and the Washa near the post called "Les Allemands" on the left bank of the Mississippi. In 1758 Gov. de Kerlerec states they formed a little village three or four leagues from New Orleans. Afterward these two tribes declined steadily and disappeared toward the end of the 18th Century.

It was not until later in the 1700s that a bond of friendship developed between the white men and the Indians of Louisiana. Even as late as 1747 and 1748, Indian raids and depredation were reported.

Indians were incited, armed and often led by the English in attack on the Germans at "Aux Allemands." By 1845 a deep bond of friendship developed between the German and the Indians.

For years thousands of Indians following migrating game spent the winters in the South. Local farmers gave them shelter on their farms. Today, good cooks of St. Charles Parish still flavor their favorite gumbo with file', which the local Indians taught them to use. Many still prepare a corn dish called "sagamite" which was introduced to them by the local Indians.

Although little is known of intermarriage between the Indians, French and Germans, descendants of the first settlers in the area now boast of Indian heritage.

## SLAVERY

The exact date the first negro slave was brought to Louisiana is not known. It has been established that Indian slavery was first tried but was not successful.

It is believed that Bienville first brought slaves from the West Indies in 1708. The company of the Indies brought slaves to the colony in 1719 and for some years slave ships arrived every year. In 1724 Bienville enacted a series of slave regulations called the "Black Code." From that time until the Civil War, slavery was an important factor in the economic life of the South.

Records of St. John Baptiste des Allemands show the following transactions:

- 8-6-74 Slave sale and manumition: Nicholas Haydel, acting for his mother, widow Ambroise Haydel, sells a slave named Joseph (27 months) to Joseph, a free negro, who believes the child to be his son. Therefore, Joseph grants freedom to



the child.

- 1-18-74 Slave sale: Jean Alsmán, a resident of New Orleans, sells a slave named Sara (20), native of Jamaica, to Mathias Auri (Ory) for 300 pounds of indigo. Witnesses: George and Jacques Deslonde.

- 6-20-74 Slave sale: Jean Baptiste Roland declares, in the presence of George and Jacques Deslonde, that he has sold a slave (30) Joseph (free negro) for 680 paistres.

## GOVERNMENT

### *Louisiana changes hands again*

The coast nominally passed into French hands again in 1800 but was transferred to the United States by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.

The two ecclesiastical parishes of St. Charles and St. John were made the County of the German Coast in 1805. On March 31, 1807, the German Coast was again divided, and St. Charles was established as a single civil entity.

The first constitution drafted for Louisiana was in the fall of 1811. It was approved the following April. On April 30, 1812, Louisiana was admitted statehood to the American Union.

The first parish official was a parish judge who was appointed by the governor. He, with the justices of the peace and 12 jurors, governed the parish.

In 1811, the jurors became elected officials. In 1845, the position of judge took on a less powerful role, and the sheriff became an elected official. The police jury continued the policy-making and administrative body of the parish, which today takes the form of a parish president and council.

In 1814, when a British ship appeared off the coast of Grand Terre, Lafitte advised Gov. Claiborne of its plans to attack New Orleans. After the battle, Lafitte and his brothers turned up on the German Coast. St. Charles Parish residents, anxious to be of assistance in the war, joined Andrew Jackson and Jean Lafitte in the battle fought in 1814.

## THE CONFEDERACY

When Lincoln became president in 1860 the United States split in two.

On Dec. 10, 1860, Gov. Thomas O. Moore called a special session of the Louisiana Legislature. The governor recommended an election of members to a convention, which would “determine the relations of Louisiana to the federal government.” At that time St. Charles Parish, unlike its neighbors, voted to secede from the union.

In 1862, a post was maintained at Des Allemands by 150 federal troops. The major effort in the war was along the northern borders. Left unprotected along the Mississippi River, New Orleans fell to union troops.

St. Charles’ involvement in the Confederacy consisted of the skirmish

near the St. Charles parish Courthouse, the battle of Boutte Crossing and the Battle of Des Allemands.

Members of the volunteer companies of the Confederacy took an oath to “bear true allegiance to the state of Louisiana and serve it honestly and faithfully... and obey the orders of the governor and such officers as may be appointed over me.”

In New Orleans, Kate Stone wrote in her diary: “A nation fighting for its own homes and liberty cannot be overwhelmed. Our cause is just and must prevail.”

Fifty dollars was offered for volunteers for the Confederate army. St. Charles, anxious to meet its quota of loyal supporters, offered an additional \$40 to those who would volunteer.

## SKIRMISH NEAR THE ST. CHARLES COURTHOUSE

The Texas Parisian Rangers led by Col. McWalters and Major E Walle, Louisiana members of the Confederacy, the Lafourche Parish Guard and General Richard Taylor (a St. Charles native), son of President Zachary Taylor, were a constant threat to union pickets.

When union soldiers were informed that the rebels were collecting cattle for their Mississippi brother, Col. Stephen Thomas of the 8th Vermont Volunteers, they rushed to the scene by railroad. They camped overnight at General Taylor’s Fashion

Plantation. After a skirmish, Captain Thomas’ troops rounded up nearly 2,000 animals to take the union lines. Slaves who had escaped from the plantations joined the procession, which stretched two or three miles.

The union soldiers plundered as they moved forward. Their plundering included Taylor’s Fashion Plantation. Rebel righters followed close behind Thomas’ forces of soldiers, animals, negroes (including 150 of Taylor’s slaves) and 20 Confederate prisoners.

## BATTLE OF BOUTTE CROSSING

While Thomas and his men were being lauded by General Butler, confederate forces in St. Charles were planning revenge.

McWalters’ men sabotaged the daily eastbound train from Des Allemands that had to pull onto a siding at Boutte station to let the westbound go through. The eastbound train was derailed, and the Confederates opened on the union train escort.

The train continued towards the end of the sidetrack, when suddenly “at the critical moment... when it seemed every chance of escape was cut off and the entire union force must perish... Pvt. Louis J. Ingalls of Company K made a quick heroic dash that saved the day. He leaped to the group, dashed through a shower of bullets, turned the switch, let the train pass on and boarded his car again.”

The two trains returned to New Orleans where Butler was informed of the Battle of Boutte Crossing.

## BATTLE OF DES ALLEMANDS

The Confederates continued along the Old Spanish Trail to Des Allemands. Under a flag of truce, the Confederate commander informed Hall of the operations at Boutte crossing and demanded an immediate surrender.

Hall surrendered his command of four officers and 137 enlisted men. The union prisoners were marched to New Iberia and later transferred from there to Vicksburg, Miss. Seven were executed on the spot.

Butler then sent a large force led by Col. James W. McMillan of the 21st Indiana up the Mississippi River by boat with orders to form a junction with Thomas at Boutte station.

McMillan's forces landed 6 miles above Hahnville and proceeded into the swamps and pursued the union soldiers to Des Allemands.

When all was over, the rebels dumped their 12 pounders into the bayou and retreated by way of Raceland.

McMillan's men captured 50 prisoners. Canister shots and a 12-pound cannon ball have been dug up in the area. Many volumes giving names of Confederate soldiers who fought in the war are

available for perusal at the Louisiana State Library. Details are given on capture and release.

## LIFE DURING AND AFTER THE WAR

Life during the Civil War was not easy for the people of the South. Government was unstable. Sugar, cotton and other crops could not be sold. There was no money to lend, and merchants could not afford to give credit.

Slaves refused to work or ran away from plantations and farms. Many families left for Texas to make a living. Women and children worked the farms. Naturally, Confederate money depreciated in value. By 1864, butter sold for \$5 per pound; eggs, \$5 a dozen; and milk, \$2.50 a quart.

The people learned to use substitutes. Old-fashioned remedies took the place of medicines. Cloth was woven and sewn at home. The women wore their handmade sunbonnets while they toiled in the fields. Shoes were made of wood, bits of leather, cloth and paper. The bare necessities of life were all that could be expected from their efforts.

The years following the war were difficult for the people of St. Charles Parish. Changes came, which were to affect both the culture and economy of the area.

There were fewer men and no slaves to work on the plantations. Economic development came slowly to the river parishes. Carpetbaggers came. Railroad

construction began to bring in a number of Jewish workers to the community.

Stein's Hotel, located on what is now the corner of Morgan Street and the Great River Road, housed these newcomers. New businesses gradually were established and provided some relief to aid the sagging southern economy.

Michael Hahn began laying out the village of Hahnville. Recreation was near non-existent except for private clubs, showboat entertainment and plantation parties. It is said that on Saturday nights it was the custom for riverboats to stop at local plantations to enjoy the music of the local brass band and join in the dancing.

The Confederate soldiers came home to poverty, humiliation and despair and faced major problems. Local and state government had to be reorganized. The local economy, once solely dependent on slavery agriculture, had to be rebuilt. The freed slave had to be defined a place in society for himself in relation to his former "masters."

On May 26, 1865, General Simon B. Buckner, acting for Gen. Kirby Smith, surrendered the rebel armies west of the Mississippi. The official document was signed on June 2. The South has lost its fight for independence.

Louisiana state and local government began to disintegrate during the spring of 1865. Gov. Henry Watkins Allen, who had followed Moore, could do little to enforce laws. Soldiers and civilians broke into

warehouses and carried off supplies. Law enforcement ceased.

After the Confederate governor of Louisiana, Allen, had surrendered his records to the federal authorities, the country parishes were given a new civil government.

## GOVERNMENT AFTER THE WAR

In 1866, Congress passed a series of radical acts instituting military reconstruction.

General Philip Sheridan was appointed military governor of the Fifth Military District, comprising Louisiana and Texas. An orderly election of delegates to a constitutional convention was held Sept. 27 and 28, 1867. The 98 delegates, equally divided between blacks and whites, met in the Mechanics Institute in New Orleans on Nov. 23 with the Republicans securely in control. The convention adjourned in March 1868. Louisiana was readmitted to the Union with five other Southern states on June 25, 1868.

In 1863, Hahn, who was an intimate friend of Lincoln, was appointed Prizo Commissioner at New Orleans. Hahn, unlike many of his southern counterparts, advocated the abolition of slavery. Hahn was elected the first free state governor in 1864 and given additional power as military governor.

In 1865, the legislature, with a negro majority, elected Hahn to the United States

Senate. Although he resigned as governor to assume this position, he was never seated. Hahn retired to Hahnville in 1872. He settled on his sugar plantation and thereafter published the St. Charles Herald, which is still in existence today as the St. Charles Herald-Guide. His home was located on what is now lot No. 5.

Louisiana emerged from the war was a Republican state. Many freed slaves now were in local and state political positions.

## NEGROES DURING THE PERIOD

Before the Civil War negroes were divided into two groups – Free negroes and slaves. Many of the free were educated and possessed property. They enjoyed economic prosperity and political prestige. The slaves, on the other hand, were uneducated and possessed little, if any, property.

The former slaves suffered most during this period. After the glorious days of freedom came a period of realization that they would have to work on their own to make a living.

Federal officers advised them to return to the plantations and work for a wage or a share of the crop. In some instances plantation owners gave land to their slaves in order for them to begin living on their own.

After the war Darensbourg bequeathed to his former slaves each a section of ground

formerly of the plantation. This area, called Free Town, is now known as Lucy.

Freed negroes often took the surnames of their former owners. Illicit sexual unions, which produced children of mixed racial heritage, were known to have occurred. Many of these children not only carried the name of the former owners of their parents but also bore resemblances to them. Lucy was known for its populous of mulattoes, or people of mixed white-black heritage.

Records show there was a public school system in the parish in 1870, although there is reason to believe that three schools existed in the parish before that time. Until 1887 there were no schools opened to African Americans. The school then had over 100 students.

At the first LTA Convention held in New Orleans in 1872, the radicals were charged with providing schools, which served no useful purpose except to provide salaries for “higher ups.” The public school fund in 1870 totaled over \$500,000, but over \$370,000 was expended for 350 teachers in New Orleans.

Before to the war, children of plantation owners were educated by tutors hired by one or more families in the community. These tutors lived at the plantations and were treated as family.

Children of slaves were not given the privilege of any type of formal education. It was not until after the war that schools were built for their education and not until 1969 that schools in the parish were fully



integrated.

In 1879 the Board of Directors, now called the School Board, was composed of eight members. They were Emile Rost, P.M. Keller, Leon Sarpy, H.L. Younger, H.C. McCutcheon (negro), George Essex (negro), Pierre Darensbourg (negro), T.T. Baudouin, (white) secretary; and A. Robens (negro), parish treasurer.

## YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

From 1877 to 1975, ferries played an important part in the transportation system of the parish. In 1887 ferries operated at several points along the river.

Although Baptist and Methodist churches were evident in the parish after the Civil War, the predominant religion is Catholicism.

Until 1896, police jurymen were appointed by the governor. Thereafter they were elected by popular vote. The police jury was made up of men representing the seven wards of the parish. Other elected parish officials included: Assessor, clerk of court, sheriff, judges, coroner, justices of the peace, constables and district attorney.

The current parish council and president came into being after a referendum in 1976. The current home rule charter and code of ordinances went into effect Jan. 7, 1978.

St. Charles Parish has been beset with tragedy through the years due to the ravages of the river. Breaks in the levee

during the 1800s at Bonnet Carre, Davis Cravasse and Hymelia in 1912 took its toll on plantation land.

Strikes for higher wages began in St. Charles in 1880, when negro farm workers went on strike for a 25 cents a day increase in wages. The presence of the military and the diplomacy of Judge James A. Augustin squelched the rioting workers. In the end, the stickers were granted clemency.

During the late 1890s and early 1900s, plantations were sold for industrial purposes. These areas went from the production of sugar to oilfields in just a few short years. Industry brought not only relief for the farmers but steady economic growth to the citizens of the parish.

Lumber companies, which began in 1895, continued operation into the 20th Century on family-owned plantations. Destrehan Plantation was one of the first plantations to be sold for industrial purposes. Mexican Petroleum Co. was one of the many companies which saw river and railroad facilities as incentives for selecting the site. Today, industrial complexes line the river in St. Charles Parish.

In 1929, the Bonnet Carre Spillway was begun in order to provide an outlet for high river waters. When not in use it provides excellent sporting and picnic areas.

Chemical refineries, fertilizer plants, grain elevators and a nuclear power plant as well as PEOPLE have found St. Charles Parish desirable for location. As a result of

the influx of new residents who support the construction and development of industry, St. Charles Parish boasts many desirable home sites and recreation areas.

Hunting and fishing as well as developed recreation sites are popular among the natives and those who have adopted this parish as home.

## KELLER'S HOMEPLACE PLANTATION

Built in 1790s, this French Colonial raised cottage is of West Indian type — one of the few left today. A sneak staircase from one of the rooms of the main floor to the service room is an emergency measure. The interior is simple. Floors are of cypress, mantles of wood, but marble is

used on the main floor. Homeplace features an intricate hand carved staircase of oak. The brick and stucco pillars supporting the main gallery have unfinished capitals and bases.

Homeplace during its early days had a series of owners including Gallaird, Forier and LeBranche.

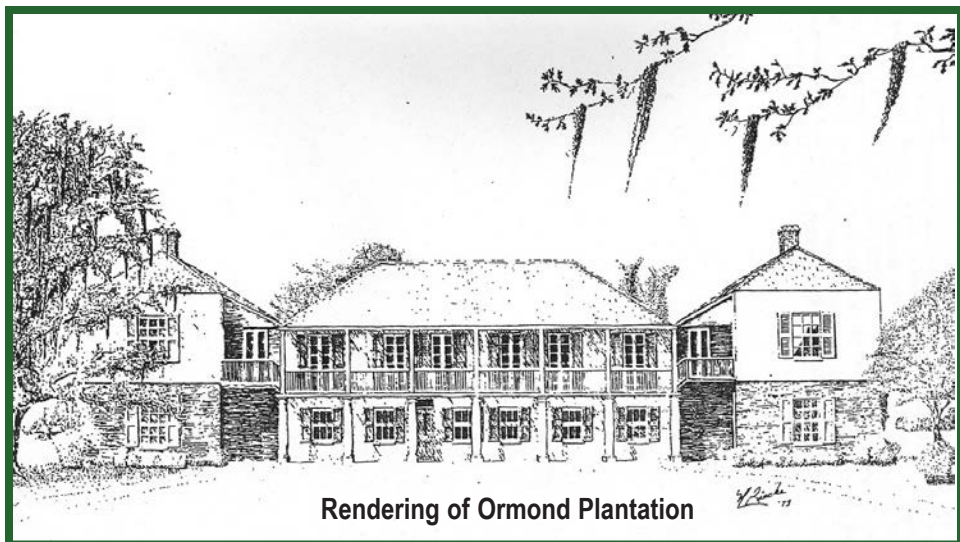
The original sugar kettle, plantation bell, grits mills, well, brick walks and pigeonierre can still be seen on the grounds.

## ORMOND PLANTATION

Ormond Plantation near Destrehan was built by Pierre Trepagnier toward the end of the Spanish regime in 1790. Its 60-foot front and rear walls are



Rendering of Keller's Homeplace Plantation



Rendering of Ormond Plantation

“brique entre poteaux” or “bricks between posts,” which was common among the homes of the Canadians. The 30-foot ends are of similar construction except that bousillage (mud) is used between the bricks.

The two wings, which were added under the supervision of Henry S. Latrohe, are constructed of plastered brick. Eleven-foot Tuscan style plastered brick columns rise from low brick bases to the upper gallery. Squared cypress posts decrease in size at the balustrade railing and continue to plain cornices.

The house passed from the hands of the Trepagniers to Richard Butler of American Revolution then to Alfred Brown of New Orleans.

After the War of 1812, Butler settled here and named the house after Ormond Castle of Ireland. In 1820, after the yellow fever epidemic, the McCutchons, who had

married into the family, took over. In 1870 the McCutchons, beset by economic issues, lost Ormond.

It was to pass through many hands before being restored to its original grace and glory by the Browns.

## DESTREHAN MANOR HOUSE

Destrehan Manor is one of the oldest plantations on the East Bank of the Mississippi River. Built in 1787 for Antoine Robert de Logny, it was acquired by Celeste de Logny, wife of Noel Destrehan.

The marriage contract and contract for the house can be seen even today in the courthouse in Hahnville. When Mrs. Destrehan, widow of Jean Noel Destrehan and daughter of the builder, died in 1823, the house was sold to Stephan Henderson. Later the house was owned by the Rost family, which held it through the



Rendering of Destrehan Manor House

Civil War and for many years after.

The house was built under the direction of Charles, a free mulatto. Accounts read: "House was built by Charles." But records show the contract allowed plantation labor. Records indicate that his pay consisted of one cow and her calf, 50 quarts of rice in chaff and 50 quarts of corn in husks.

The architectural style is rare in this area. The Gothic roof style shows a typical house of the West Indies. Thick walls, brick and cypress are common to the structure. Additions were made to the house in 1820 to accommodate the 14

children of the Destrehan family.

In 1914 the Mexican Petroleum Co.

purchased the house and plantation lands. In 1972, the house and surrounding land were donated to the River Road Historical Society for restoration and is now listed on the National Historic Register.

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From left: Holy Rosary Church in its Taft location; Ellington Plantation in 1902 (now the site of Monsanto Park); Hirsch Store in Ama.  
Photos courtesy Patrick Yoes.

**For additional copies, contact the St. Charles Parish Council Office at P.O. Box 302 Hahnville, LA 70057 or download this pamphlet online at [www.stcharlesparish-la.gov](http://www.stcharlesparish-la.gov).**

From left: Bayou Gauche in the early days; Schexnaydre family posing in front of Ormond Plantation; the old Hahnville High School located next to the courthouse. Photos courtesy Patrick Yoes.

